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BREATHING INTO WHOLENESS

by Laurie A. Monroe

Stanislav Grof, MD, is a psychiatrist with over forty years of research experience in non-ordinary states of consciousness. In 1973 he was named scholar-in-residence at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California. There, Stan gave seminars, lectured, and developed Holotropic Breathwork with his wife, Christina. At about the same time he met Robert Monroe, shortly after *Journeys Out of the Body* had been published. My father had been invited to Esalen to conduct the *GATEWAY VOYAGE®*—one of our first weeklong programs. Grof was impressed with my father's work and encouraged him to continue writing about his personal experiences, as well as the research he was conducting with sound and consciousness. It was my pleasure to meet Stan and attend the Holotropic Breathwork weekend workshop he conducted in Washington, D.C., late in 2000. He is a gentle man with a great deal of compassion for humanity. Stan's lectures and personal interactions with participants vividly demonstrate his far-reaching knowledge and his understanding of different states of consciousness.

Grof coined the term "holotropic," which means, "moving in the direction of wholeness." There are strong similarities between holotropic and what we refer to as "phasing." By phasing or shifting awareness beyond the limitations of the physical, it is possible to move into wholeness and remember one's true identity. In Holotropic Breathwork, the participants use accelerated breathing and evocative music to attain very powerful states of consciousness. Breathwork facilitators use bodywork as needed to assist in releasing any negative energy that is held in the cells of the physical body. The facilitator's only role is to support the process and provide a space for the individual's own inner-healing nature to transform the experience.

I introduced myself to Stan at the opening of the workshop. He indicated that he was pleased to meet me and quite interested to see how I would respond, given my years of immersion in non-ordinary states through our work at the Institute. The 120 participants were divided into six groups of twenty each. There were two facilitators per group. It was surely not coincidental that one of my facilitators had

attended TMI programs. He was excited about my opportunity to experience Holotropic Breathwork and eager to observe how my process would unfold. Each session is two and one half to three hours long. As the breather, you lie on the floor in a comfortable nest constructed from sleeping bags and pillows. The “sitter” is your partner and stays with you throughout. The sitter’s role is simply to be there for you and support you in whatever way is most appropriate. My partner wanted me to breathe first, and I readily agreed.

As we snuggled into our cozy nests, Stan led us into the beginning of our breathwork. He instructed us to breathe faster and deeper and to create a continuous circle of breath. By doing so, I quickly found my breathing rhythm and entered a state of deep relaxation. The music was designed to “drive” the experience and was well suited to that purpose. At first it was uplifting and flowing, increasing in power as the session progressed. I entered into the flow and surrendered to my own inner process with total trust in its wisdom.

Initially, I felt tension being released through my hands. As the music intensified, I moved into an expanded state of awareness that resembled Focus 12. Feelings of total, unconditional love and connection to everyone and everything in the room flooded through me. We were one whole; there was no separation. As some participants experienced profound emotional release, I projected compassion and love to them. My awareness expanded beyond the room into other dimensions. As the music built to a crescendo for the “breakthrough” stage, I realized that I was in Focus 27. My state of mind was buoyant and peaceful. The breathwork effects were extraordinary. At the end of the session Stan knelt beside me and smiled. I hugged him with an overwhelming sense of appreciation for his work and my father’s. A little later we drew mandalas to represent different aspects of the session and brought them with us when the whole group reassembled. The facilitators did not interpret. They simply held the space for honest and open sharing. Each participant deepened the experience through his or her personal interpretation.

The work of Stanislav Grof and the work of my father have much in common. Both the Hemi-Sync process and Holotropic Breathwork engender profound non-ordinary states of consciousness. Both are capable of evoking healing on many different levels. As we continue to explore the realms of consciousness, it is evident that a shift is taking place in our world. Stan suggests that “a radical inner

transformation of humanity and a rise to a higher level of consciousness might be humankind's only real hope for the future." I know that we at the Institute are helping many people to achieve the inner transformation that is necessary in order to flourish in that future. Please share your stories with others so that they, too, may remember their true identity, which exists beyond this physical reality. As each one of us remembers our wholeness, the possibility of a future embraced by harmony, balance, and unity increases exponentially.

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